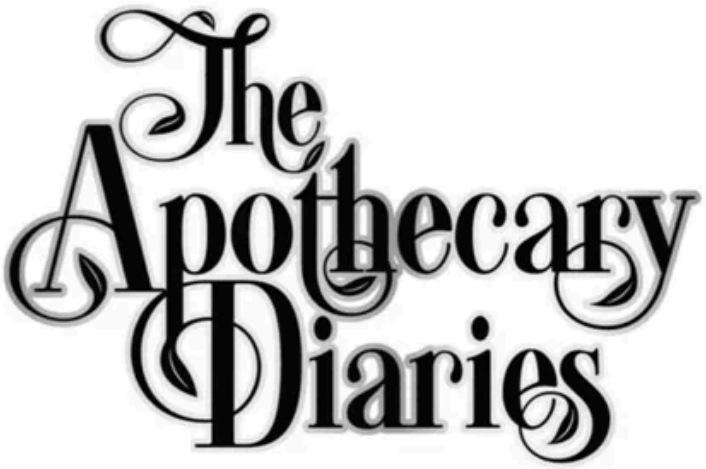
I'M BORED.
Chapter 49 The Clinic
XIAO-LAN...
...IS ADMIRABLY ATTENDING CLASSES AT THE NEWLY OPENED TRAINING SCHOOL...
...AS ONE OF ITS INAUGURAL STUDENTS.
I GUESS XIAOLAN ISN'T COMING TODAY.
THERE'S NOTHING MUCH TO DO BACK AT THE JADE PALACE EITHER.
I GUESS I COULD GO VISIT THE QUACK...
ON SECOND THOUGHT, MAYBE NOT.


The
Apothecary
Diaries

WHAT'S MORE, THAT CASE HAS YET TO BE TRULY RESOLVED.
I'VE BEEN SO WRAPPED UP IN PUTTING ON A SHOW FOR THE ENVOYS THAT I'D FORGOT-TEN...
...JUST HOW BUSY THE PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE GREW ONCE THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PERFUME OILS CAME TO LIGHT A WHILE AGO.
WHEN JINSHI LOOKED INTO IT...
...HE LEARNED THAT THE CONSORTS' LADIES-IN-WAITING HAD BOUGHT THE PERFUME OILS FROM THE CARAVAN IN SWARMS.
THE CARAVAN HAD BROUGHT IN THE OILS THROUGH OFFICIAL CHANNELS TO SELL.
IT WASN'T FEASIBLE TO BLAME THE WOMEN WHO BOUGHT THEM.
EVEN THE LADIES AT THE JADE PALACE...
...BOUGHT A BUNCH.
THE YOUNG WOMEN HERE LIVE THEIR LIVES TRAPPED IN THE ORNATE BIRDCAGE THAT IS THE INNER COURT.
LITTLE WONDER THEN THAT THEY YEARN FOR SUCH WARES, THEIR EYES SPARKLING AT THE SIGHT OF GOODS...
...WHICH HAVE CROSSED OCEANS, MOUNTAINS, AND DESERTS TO REACH THEM FROM A FARAWAY LAND.

EACH ALONE MAY BE HARMLESS IN TRACE AMOUNTS ...
...BUT THEY COULD BE USED TO MAKE A POWERFUL POISON IN COMBINATION.
THE QUESTION BEFORE US NOW IS IDENTIFYING WHO EXACTLY ATTEMPTED TO BRING THESE POTENTIAL POISONS INTO THE INNER COURT.
IF THEY'D BEEN SELLING MEDICINES POPULAR IN THE WEST...
...THEN I WOULD'VE BOUGHT THEM MYSELF, EVEN IF IT MEANT BORROWING MONEY FROM THE OLD HAG.
WHILE WE CAN'T MAKE A SWEEPING GENERALIZATION AND CALL THEM ALL BAD...
...WE ALSO CAN'T PERMIT SCENTS WITH POISONOUS PROPERTIES TO REMAIN AT THE INNER COURT EVEN IN SMALL QUANTITIES.
I CAN'T SPEAK TO ALL THE TYPES OF PERFUMES AND SPICES THEY BROUGHT...
...BUT I DO KNOW THE MERCHANTS RECOMMENDED CLOTHING APPROPRIATE FOR A WOMAN WITH CHILD TO THE FOUR CONSORTS...
...IN AN ATTEMPT TO GATHER INTELLIGENCE ABOUT OUR NATION.

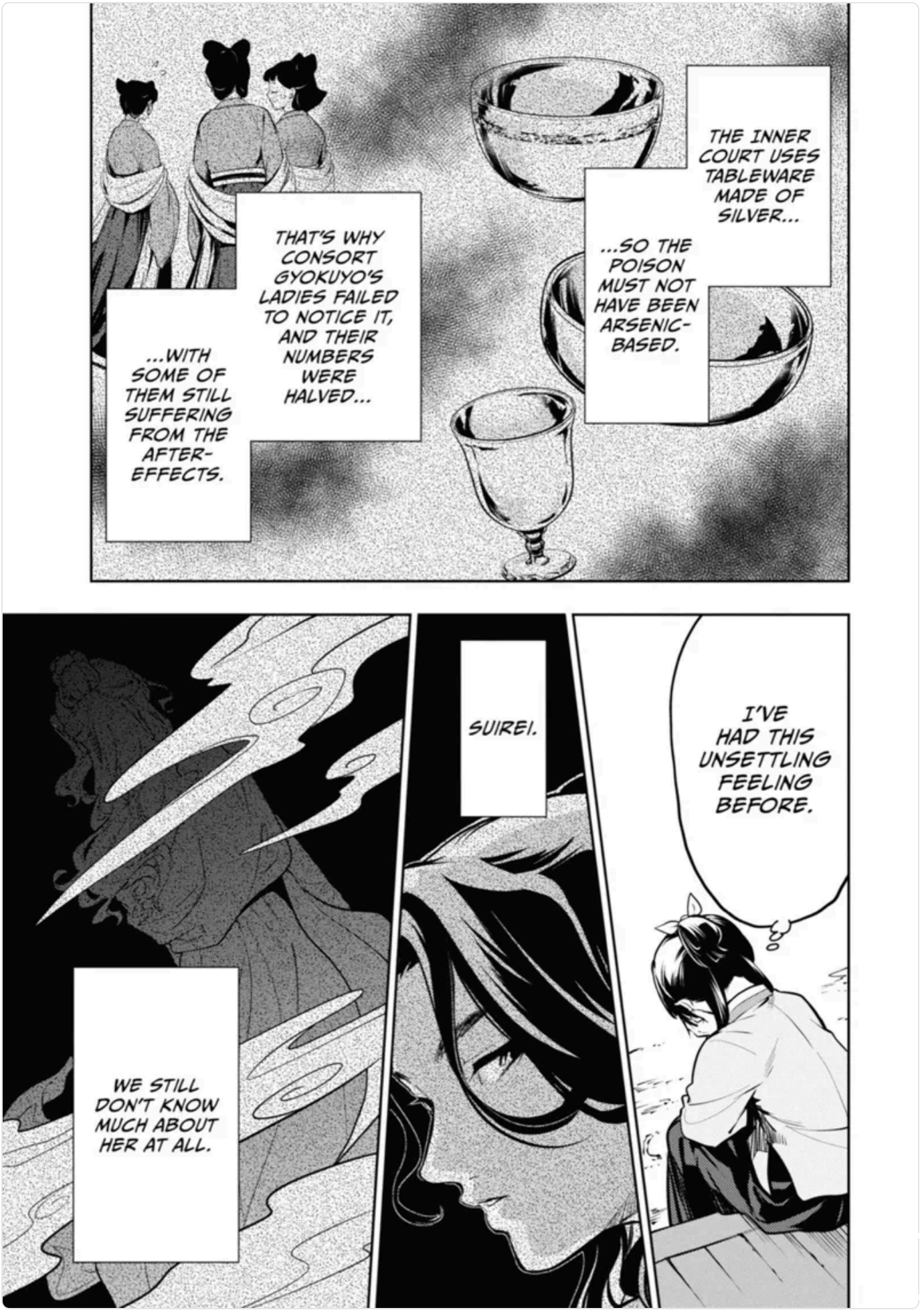
AS FOR WHO WAS BEHIND IT, THE ENVOYS ARE THE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES.
IN COMING HERE, THE ENVOYS...
...MUST'VE HAD THEIR EYE ON SECURING A CONSORT'S PLACE FOR THEM-SELVES.
EVEN IF THAT WASN'T THEIR MAIN GOAL...
...ONE OF THEM WAS QUITE SURE OF HERSELF, IF HER BEHAVIOR AT THE BANQUET WAS ANYTHING TO GO BY.
BUT THE EVENT ENDED UNFOR-TUNATELY FOR HER, LEAVING HER PRIDE IN TATTERS...
...AND SHE HASN'T MADE ANY BOLD MOVES SINCE.
IT IS POSSIBLE THE PERFUME OILS WERE THEIR DOING ...
...BUT JUMPING TO CON-CLUSIONS IS NEVER A GOOD IDEA.

...CONSORT LISHU...
...CONSORT GYOKUYO...
...AND CONSORT LOULAN.
...CONSORT LIHUA...
AT PRESENT, THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS AT THE INNER COURT ARE...
NEXT WOULD COME CONSORT LIHUA...
IN TERMS OF THE POLITICAL POWER OF THE FAMILIES BEHIND THEM...
...BUT THAT'S BECAUSE SHE AND HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY ARE RELATED ON HIS MOTHER'S SIDE...
...CONSORT LOULAN IS PROBABLY THE ONE THE EMPEROR NEEDS TO TREAT AS THE MOST IMPORTANT.
...AND SHE ISN'T THE KIND OF WOMAN TO GREEDILY SEEK ADVANCEMENT.

SHE HAILS FROM A WESTERN NATION THAT SERVES AS A BASE OF COM-MERCE.
AND THEN THERE'S CONSORT GYOKUYO, THE EMPEROR'S FAVORITE.
...IS SO AMBITIOUS THAT THEY OFFERED UP THEIR VERY YOUNG DAUGHTER TO SERVICE THE LAST EMPEROR.
ON THE OTHER HAND, CONSORT LISHU'S FAMILY, HAVING RISEN STEADILY IN PROMINENCE OVER THE PAST FEW GENERA-TIONS...

...SO CALLING IT A NATION OF PLENTY SEEMS A STRETCH.
ON TOP OF THAT, THE LAND IS INFER-TILE...
...AND THE CITIZENS ARE TAXED EXORBITANTLY FOR THE SAKE OF NATIONAL DEFENSE.
WHILE EVERYONE SEEMS TO BE UNDER THE IMPRES-SION THAT IT'S QUITE WEALTHY, IN TRUTH, THE COUNTRY IS ON AN INTER-NATIONAL BORDER...

SHE ALSO ENDURED THAT ATTEMPTED POISONING AT THE GARDEN BANQUET LAST YEAR.
THE FORMER CONSORT LADY ADUO'S ATTENDANT HAD ACTED OF HER OWN ACCORD...
...NOT OUT OF A DESIRE FOR POWER, BUT FOR MORE PERSONAL REASONS.
WHAT ABOUT THE ATTEMPTED POISON-ING...
...THAT I'M TOLD HAPPENED BEFORE THAT, THOUGH?
IF HONG-NIANG'S GLARE FROM THE FUNERAL SERVES AS PROOF...
...THE CULPRIT BEHIND IT WAS THE MID-RANKING CONSORT WHO DIED IN THE POISONOUS MUSHROOM INCIDENT A LITTLE WHILE AGO.
BUT IF THAT'S TRUE...
...HOW DID SHE COME TO KNOW ABOUT POISONS?


THE INNER COURT USES TABLEWARE MADE OF SILVER...
...SO THE POISON MUST NOT HAVE BEEN ARSENIC-BASED.
THAT'S WHY CONSORT GYOKUYO'S LADIES FAILED TO NOTICE IT, AND THEIR NUMBERS WERE HALVED...
...WITH SOME OF THEM STILL SUFFERING FROM THE AFTER-EFFECTS.
I'VE HAD THIS UNSETTLING FEELING BEFORE.
SUIREI.
WE STILL DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HER AT ALL.

WHY DID SHE DO IT?
WHAT WAS HER AIM?
SWIRL
SHE TRIED TO TAKE JINSHI'S LIFE...
...BUT TO WHAT END?
SWIRL
.....
WHAT POINT IS THERE IN A SIMPLE FOOD TASTER LIKE ME THINKING THESE KINDS OF THOUGHTS ...?
WHETHER I THINK THEM OR NOT...
...THERE'LL NEVER BE A SHORTAGE OF BLEAK SUBJECTS TO PONDER IN THIS WORLD.
TOSS
I NEED TO THINK ABOUT SOME-THING ELSE.

CHERRY SEASON IS ALMOST AT AN END.
THE GROUNDS OF THE INNER COURT BOAST PINE THICKETS, BAMBOO GROVES, AND FRUIT ORCHARDS FOR THE EMPEROR'S ENJOYMENT.
ANOTHER THREE MONTHS EARLIER, AND I COULD'VE HARVESTED BAMBOO SHOOTS...
...BUT I HAD MY HANDS FULL AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE CULTIVATING ROSES THANKS TO A CERTAIN SOMEONE.
UGH, JUST THINKING ABOUT IT MAKES ME BOIL WITH ANGER.
ENOUGH OF THAT. MOVING ON...
...OH?

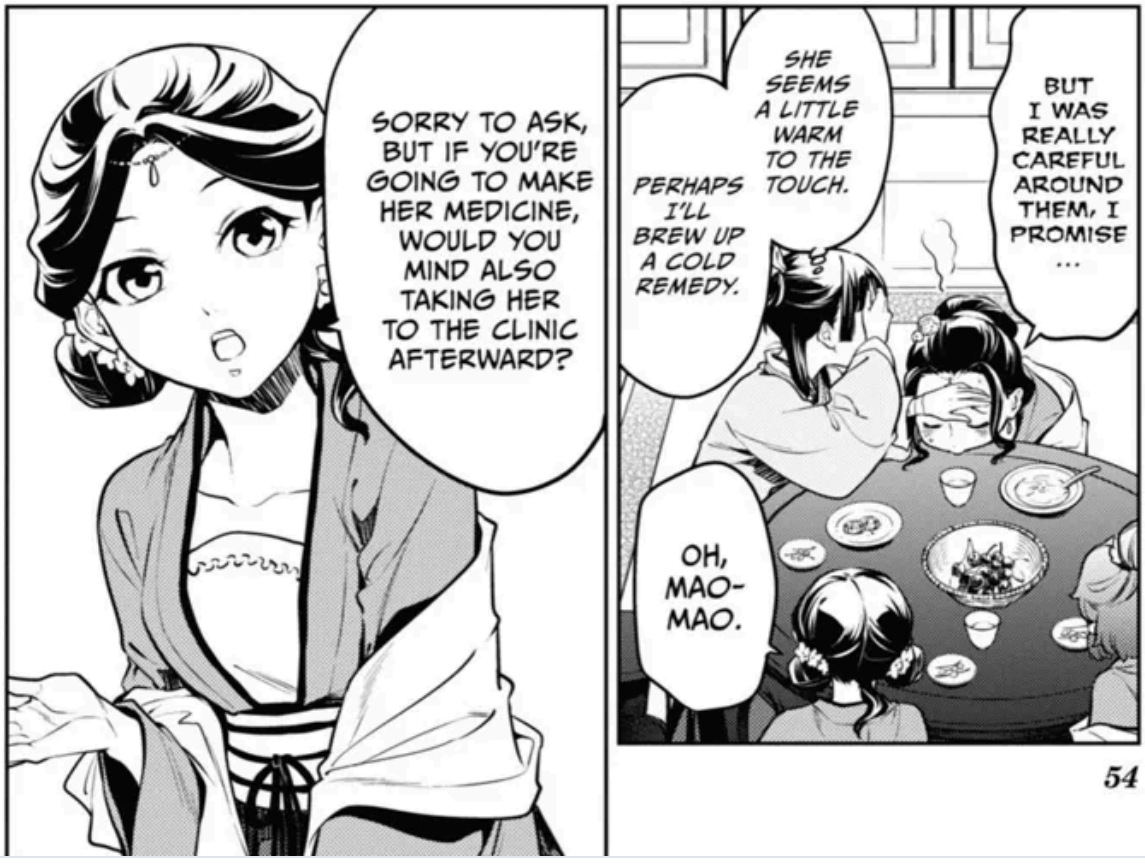
ZOOM
EEK~!
JOLT
THE LADIES FROM THE CRYSTAL PALACE.
BOW
NOW THAT'S JUST UNCALLED FOR. RUNNING AWAY AT SPEED AND WITH SOME OF THEIR FEET BOUND, NO LESS...
...SIMPLY BECAUSE I UNDRESSED ONE OF THEM A SMIDGE? OVERREACT MUCH?
THOSE WOMEN ARE ALWAYS ON TOP OF THE LATEST FADS. IT'S WHY I HAD TO SNIFF THEM.
I KNEW THEY'D BE WEARING THE PERFUME OILS THEY BOUGHT FROM THE CARAVAN.
IT'S NOT AS IF I DID IT BECAUSE I WANTED TO.

AND THAT GOT ME AN EARFUL FROM HIS GRACE THE BEAUTIFUL EUNUCH.
...WHICH ENDED IN ME TAKING OFF HER CLOTHES.
I THOUGHT IT STRANGE AND WANTED TO CONFIRM THAT SHE REALLY WORE NO SCENTS...
SNIFF
SNIFF
FWIP
BUT THERE WAS ONE WOMAN WHO WASN'T WEARING ANY.
!

I SUPPOSE IT'S NOT UNUSUAL FOR THERE TO BE ONE AMONG THEM WHO DOESN'T SUBSCRIBE TO THE NEWEST TRENDS.
ADD TO THAT THE PERSONAL MAIDS ATTACHED TO THE PALACE, AND YOU'VE GOT 30 IN ALL. THE HOUSEHOLD AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE SURE IS HUGE.
WELL, THE CRYSTAL PALACE'S LADIES-IN WAITING ALONE ARE TEN IN NUMBER.

PLUCK

I'M FEELING A LITTLE EXHAUSTED TODAY...
HEY, DON'T GO GETTING SICK.
WHAT IF CONSORT GYOKUYO AND THE PRINCESS CATCH IT FROM YOU?


SORRY TO ASK, BUT IF YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE HER MEDICINE, WOULD YOU MIND ALSO TAKING HER TO THE CLINIC AFTERWARD?
BUT I WAS REALLY CAREFUL AROUND THEM, I PROMISE ...
SHE SEEMS A LITTLE WARM TO THE TOUCH.
PERHAPS I'LL BREW UP A COLD REMEDY.
OH, MAO-MAO.

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I DON'T MEAN THE PHYSI-CIAN'S OFFICE.
THIS ONE DOESN'T HAVE A DOCTOR, BUT THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE WHO TAKES CARE OF PEOPLE.
ANYWAY, AILAN KNOWS WHERE IT IS, SO JUST MAKE SURE SHE GETS THERE.
WHAT CLINIC?

ALL RIGHT.

I HAD NO IDEA THERE WAS A PLACE LIKE THIS BEHIND THE LAUNDRY.
I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE.
THEY MUST HAVE MADE A QUICK MENTION OF IT WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVED. DID YOU FORGET?
I GUESS SO...
I WAS TOO BUSY SULKING THEN AND BARELY LISTENED AT ALL.
EXCUSE ME.
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, BUT I THINK I'VE CAUGHT A COLD.
HM?

YOU'VE GOT A SLIGHT FEVER. STICK OUT YOUR TONGUE FOR ME.
IT'S NOT OFTEN YOU SEE MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN AROUND HERE.
WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?
TAKE IT EASY FOR A FEW DAYS, AND YOU'LL BE BETTER SOON.
IT DOESN'T SEEM TOO BAD.
SHE SEEMS MUCH MORE SKILLED THAN THE QUACK.
HER DIAGNOSIS IS ALSO SOUND.
OOOH ~!
HMM.
JUST IN CASE!
I CAN'T ALLOW MY LADY TO GET SICK. MAY I PLEASE STAY HERE?
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THOUGH THE ONLY DOCTOR HERE IS THE QUACK, IT MUST BE BECAUSE OF THIS PLACE...
...THAT DISEASE DOESN'T RUN RAMPANT THROUGH THE INNER COURT.
WELL, THEN... PLEASE LET EVERYONE KNOW I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW, OKAY?
I WILL.

THE PILLARS ARE UNADORNED, THE HALLS FLOORED IN WOOD.
THE WINDOWS TOO, WHILE SQUARE, ARE EVENLY SPACED.
THE BUILDING IS MODEST, WITH NO FLOURISHES TO SPEAK OF.
IT'S ACTUALLY A VERY LOGICAL LOCATION FOR THIS KIND OF THING.
WITH THE LACK OF ORNAMENTATION, CLEANING MUST BE VERY EASY. THE PLACE IS SPOTLESS.
IT'S AN EXCELLENT SITE FOR A MEDICAL FACILITY, ESPECIALLY SINCE BEING HYGIENIC IS SO IMPORTANT.
AND WITH THE LAUNDRY SO CLOSE BY, THEY MUST BE ABLE TO WASH CLOTHES AND BEDDING RIGHT AWAY.

COME, NOW. HURRY ON BACK TO YOUR WORK.
DON'T THINK YOU'RE ALLOWED TO SLACK JUST BECAUSE YOU ACCOMPANIED YOUR FRIEND.
.....
BUT WHAT I'M MOST CURIOUS ABOUT IS...
THIS PLACE IS ALSO WELL VENTILATED, AND THE SMELL OF ALCOHOL IS UNMISTAK-ABLE.
THAT'S PROOF THEY REGULARLY CLEAN AND DISINFECT.
ひょ
PLUCK
SHAKE
SHAKE
WOULD YOU BE MORE INTERESTED IN WASHING EVERYTHING THAT NEEDS WASHING HERE?
WHAT ...?

I WANTED TO SEE MORE OF THE PLACE...
...BUT I GO AGAINST THAT LADY'S ORDERS AT MY OWN PERIL.
STILL...
...I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT MANY OLDER COURT LADIES HERE BEFORE.
I WONDER IF THE CLINIC WOMEN ARE GIVEN LEAVE TO STAY AT THE INNER COURT BECAUSE THE WORK THEY DO IS SO ESSENTIAL.
GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE INNER COURT...
...THE WOMEN EMPLOYED HERE ARE SEMIFORCIBLY REPLACED AS A MATTER OF COURSE BEFORE THEY REACH THE AGE OF 30.
THOSE WHO REMAIN ARE EITHER OF A HIGH RANK ON PAR WITH THAT OF THE HEAD EUNUCH...
...OR PERSONAL ATTENDANTS WHO ARE PART OF A CONSORT'S INNER CIRCLE.

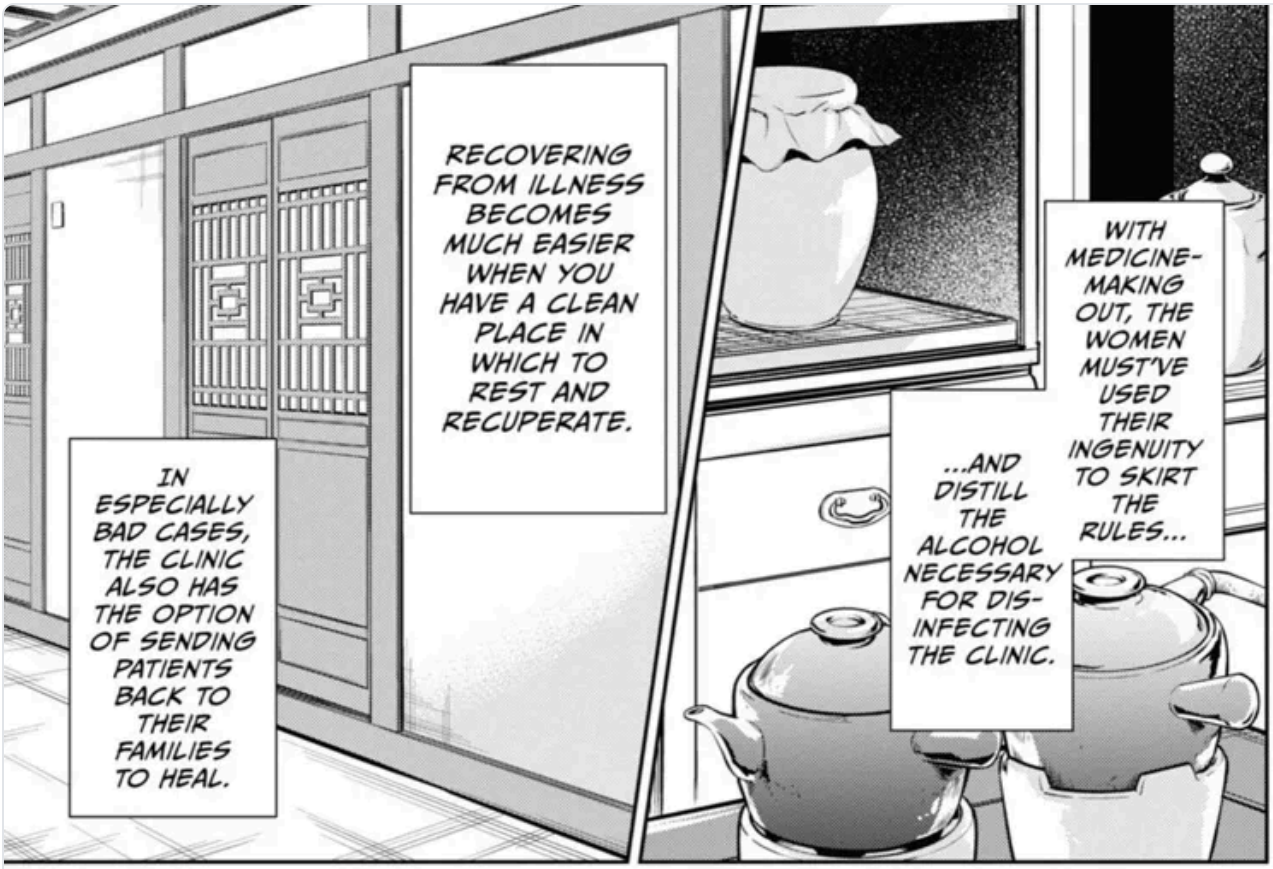
ANYWAY, THAT CLINIC...
...DIDN'T SMELL OF MEDICINE AT ALL.
WAS IT BEING HIDDEN BY THE ODOR OF THE ALCOHOL?
OR PER-HAPS—
DON'T WALK AROUND MUTTERING TO YOURSELF LIKE THAT.
BUMP
YOU'LL TRIP.

WAS I TALKING TO YOU?
GOOD GRIEF.
WHAT A LOST CAUSE.
HOW MAY I BE OF ASSIS-TANCE, SIR?
FUME
GLANCE

ER...
THERE'S NOTHING IN PARTICULAR I REQUIRE TODAY.
BUT WHAT HARM IS THERE IN TALKING TO A PERSON YOU HAPPEN TO BUMP INTO?
I CAN TELL THAT GAO SHUN IS TRYING TO CONVEY SOMETHING TO ME...
...BUT I HAVE NO CLUE WHAT THAT IS. SORRY, GAO SHUN.
WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM?
THE CLINIC.
I NEVER IMAGINED A PLACE LIKE THAT EXISTED HERE.

...I WONDER WHY THIS EUNUCH SOMETIMES LOSES CONFIDENCE IN HIS WORK LIKE THIS.
FOR SOMEONE USUALLY SO SELF-ASSURED IN ATTITUDE...
DID I FORGET TO WHEN YOU CAME?
...I MAKE A POINT OF TELLING ALL THE NEW COURT WOMEN ABOUT IT WHILE SHOWING THEM AROUND WHEN THEY FIRST ARRIVE.
NO. I'M QUITE SURE YOU DIDN'T.
I'D EVEN SAY IT WOULD MAKE FOR A BETTER PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE THAN THE ACTUAL PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE.
I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND IT MUCH CLEANER AND MORE EFFICIENT THAN I'D ANTICIPATED.

SIGH...
IF ONLY WE COULD.
WHY CAN'T YOU?
AS A RULE, ONLY MEN ARE ALLOWED TO FORMULATE MEDICINES.
MINOR SCRAPES ASIDE, THE CLINIC IS ALSO UNABLE TO TREAT SERIOUS INJURIES.
BECAUSE MEN ALONE MAY BE DOCTORS.
THAT EXPLAINS THE LACK OF ANY MEDICINAL SMELLS.


IN ESPECIALLY BAD CASES, THE CLINIC ALSO HAS THE OPTION OF SENDING PATIENTS BACK TO THEIR FAMILIES TO HEAL.
RECOVERING FROM ILLNESS BECOMES MUCH EASIER WHEN YOU HAVE A CLEAN PLACE IN WHICH TO REST AND RECUPERATE.
...AND DISTILL THE ALCOHOL NECESSARY FOR DIS-INFECTING THE CLINIC.
WITH MEDICINE-MAKING OUT, THE WOMEN MUST'VE USED THEIR INGENUITY TO SKIRT THE RULES...

GA
SP

...BUT I'VE ALSO BEEN BREWING UP WHATEVER I LIKE THIS WHOLE TIME.
I'VE USED MEDICINES FROM THE PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE AND PLANTS GROWING ON THE GROUNDS HERE...
...WAIT.
WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE ME?

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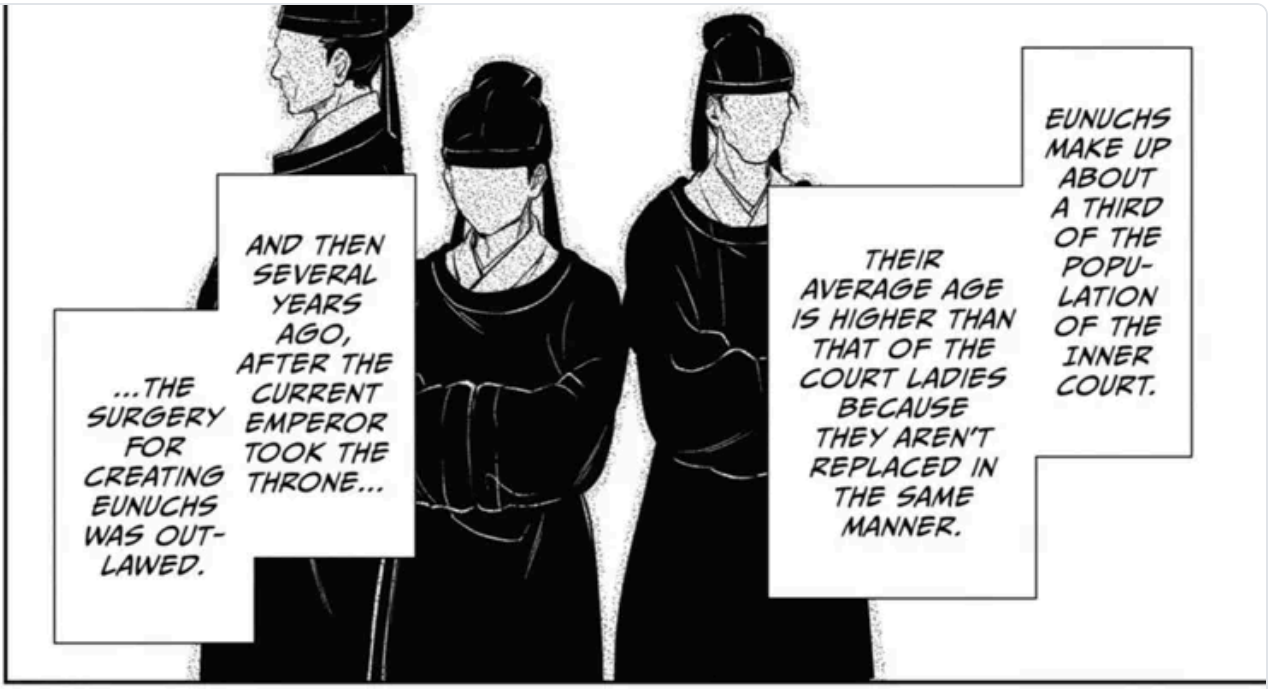
...IT ALL SEEMS SOMEHOW RATHER COMPLI-CATED TO ME.
...STANDS OUT TOO MUCH FOR US TO ALLOW THEM THE USE OF MEDICINES.
BUT A PLACE LIKE THAT...
A FAIR FEW CONSORTS HAVE LADIES-IN-WAITING WITH SOME MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THEIR EMPLOY.
WE'VE BEEN TURNING A BLIND EYE TO YOU.
THE WORLD IS FULL OF PEOPLE WHO'D PREFER NOT TO ROCK THE BOAT, AFTER ALL.
...OR PERHAPS TRYING TO UNDO SOMETHING ALREADY ESTABLISHED IS MORE TROUBLE THAN IT'S WORTH.
THERE MAY BE NONSENSICAL INSTITUTIONS AND LAWS TO CONTEND WITH...

I HOPE IN FUTURE...
...WE CAN PROCURE PHYSICIANS UNDER DIFFERENT RULES...
AHH YES. EUNUCHS.
...SO THAT WE MAY DO WITHOUT EUNUCHS.
69


EUNUCHS MAKE UP ABOUT A THIRD OF THE POPU-LATION OF THE INNER COURT.
THEIR AVERAGE AGE IS HIGHER THAN THAT OF THE COURT LADIES BECAUSE THEY AREN'T REPLACED IN THE SAME MANNER.
AND THEN SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AFTER THE CURRENT EMPEROR TOOK THE THRONE...
...THE SURGERY FOR CREATING EUNUCHS WAS OUT-LAWED.

CON-SIDERING JINSHI'S AGE...
...HE MUST'VE UNDERGONE THE PROCE-DURE...
...JUST BEFORE THEY BANNED IT.

THERE AREN'T MANY YOUNG EUNUCHS NOW, AND NO OTHERS WILL BE JOINING THEIR RANKS.
IT'S PLAIN TO SEE THE INNER COURT IS GOING TO RUN OUT OF SERVANTS.

PEEK

IF ONLY THEY COULD HAVE WAITED A BIT LONGER...

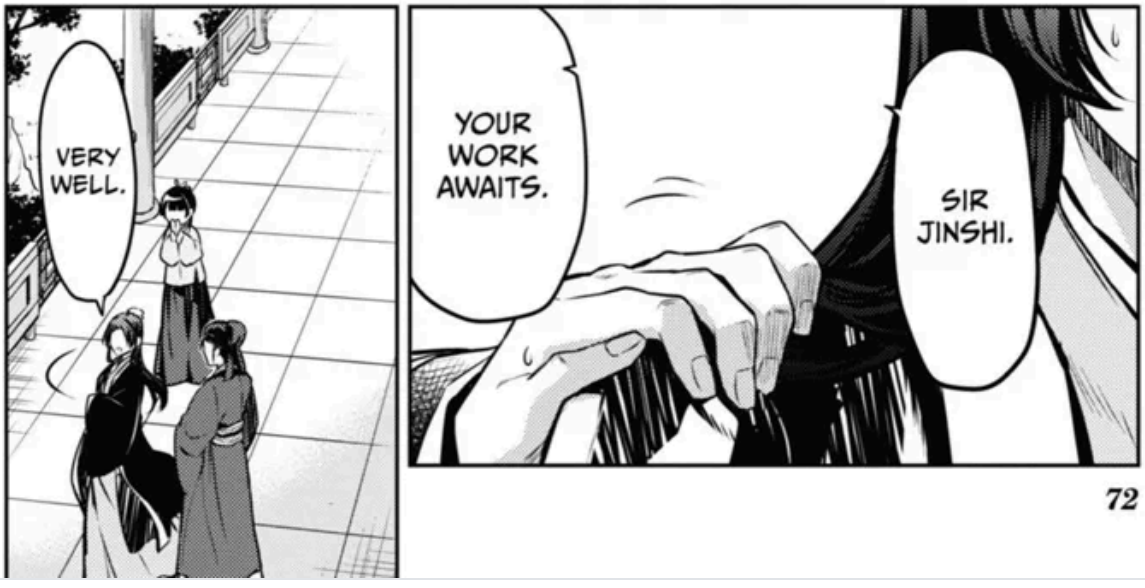
HMM?
HMM?
ちーーーん
DIIIING
POOR GUY.

GASP

71

ZAP
はぁ
ちっ

I DIDN'T SAY THAT OUT LOUD... DID I?
SHP
OH DEAR.


VERY WELL.
YOUR WORK AWAITS.
SIR JINSHI.

72

YES, SIR.
OH YES.
TELL THE JADE PALACE I SHALL BE PAYING THEM A VISIT LATER.
I WONDER IF I COULD TURN A PROFIT ...
...BY CONCOCTING A MEDICINE TO HELP YOU-KNOW-WHAT GROW BACK.